

VZCZCXRO9224  
PP RUEHDBU  
DE RUEHEK #0125/01 0371159  
ZNY CCCCC ZZH  
P 061159Z FEB 07  
FM AMEMBASSY BISHKEK  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8931  
INFO RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE PRIORITY  
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING PRIORITY 1936  
RUEHLM/AMEMBASSY COLOMBO PRIORITY 0041  
RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA PRIORITY 0054  
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD PRIORITY 0519  
RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL PRIORITY 0337  
RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU PRIORITY 0051  
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 0208  
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC PRIORITY  
RUEKJCS/OSD WASHDC PRIORITY  
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY  
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC PRIORITY  
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC PRIORITY  
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA PRIORITY 0465  
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE PRIORITY 2346  
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 1731  
RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO BRUSSELS BE PRIORITY  
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS PRIORITY  
RUEHLMC/MILLENNIUM CHALLENGE CORP PRIORITY  
RUMICEA/USCENTCOM INTEL CEN MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 BISHKEK 000125

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR SCA/CEN

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/06/2017

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [MARR](#) [KG](#)

SUBJECT: MANAGING KYRGYZ CRITICISM OF MANAS AIR BASE

REF: A. 06 STATE 199856

[1](#)B. BISHKEK 124

[1](#)C. BISHKEK 86

BISHKEK 00000125 001.2 OF 004

Classified By: CDA Lee Litzenberger, Reason 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: Kyrgyz domestic political turmoil in December and January over a new constitution and government has shifted public and political attention away from Manas Air Base. This welcome hiatus may prove temporary, however, once the new government is in place. Looking ahead, we see several events that could renew controversy over the base: announcement of the results of our investigation into the December 6 shooting incident; announcement of our response to the victim's widow's compensation claim; our decision on compensation for the September collision between a USAF plane and a Kyrgyz airliner; parliamentary consideration of whether to hold hearings on the base as agreed in December; MFA consideration of whether and how to carry out the President's instructions to renegotiate the base agreement; and Kyrgyzstan's hosting of the June summit of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (whose members have already questioned the need for the base). Each of these events could generate pressure on GOKG officials to take strident public positions critical of the base. Our recommendations for managing the consequences are at para eight below. END SUMMARY.

TEMPORARY QUIET IN THE EAST  
-----

[1](#)2. (C) Over the past month there has been a break in Kyrgyz media criticism of Manas Air Base, as politicians focused on internal politics, voting on both a new constitution and a

new prime minister. We expect that once the new Cabinet is named in early February, Kyrgyz attention will return to the base, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs will inform us of how the Kyrgyz Government would like to proceed following the December 6 shooting incident at the Base in which a Kyrgyz truck driver was killed by a U.S. Air Force security guard. In fact, this renewed focus on the base may have already begun. Parliamentary Speaker Sultanov, during his recent visit to the U.S., indicated to the press on February 2 that the GOKG would be seeking to renegotiate the terms of the base agreement.

#### CABINET VOTES BASE SHOULD STAY

-----

13. (C) On January 8, the cabinet met to discuss the shooting incident and President Bakiyev's December instruction to the MFA to renegotiate the base agreement with the purpose of revoking the clause that the U.S. military retains criminal jurisdiction over base personnel. We understand from Deputy Minister of Defense Oruzbayev, Minister of Interior Suvanaliev, and former Prime Minister Kulov that the cabinet voted for and forwarded to the President a recommendation that the base should remain in Kyrgyzstan. Most interlocutors have also told us that the Kyrgyz Government has dropped the demand for criminal jurisdiction over base personnel, as the MFA has concluded this would not be consistent with international law. MFA was also ordered to follow up with the Embassy on this and other issues, which Suvanaliev said included a request for changes in procedures at the base including joint patrols at check points.

14. (C) Deputy Foreign Minister Sarbayev told us he was unaware of the January 8 cabinet meeting and to date we have heard nothing from the MFA. While there is a question

BISHKEK 00000125 002.2 OF 004

whether the new cabinet will honor the decision of the old cabinet, we suspect that it will and have heard nothing to the contrary. President Bakiyev is the real decision-maker on base issues (although he likes to hide behind the government), and Defense Minister Isakov has repeatedly assured us that the President understands the continued need for the base and wants the base to remain in Kyrgyzstan. (Note: Isakov enjoys a very close relationship with President Bakiyev, and we expect him to continue in his current position in the new government. End Note.) It is a positive development that the contentious base issues (including processing of Kyrgyz Air's claim regarding the Tupolev damaged in a collision with a USAF plane in September, flight safety issues, the investigation into the shooting, and the processing of Mrs. Ivanova's claim) are currently being handled at the expert level rather than at the political level.

#### TROUBLE AHEAD

-----

15. (C) Nevertheless, this relatively quiet period will not last indefinitely. We expect that potential flashpoints on the horizon include the following: 1) possible public announcement by Kyrgyz investigators that the airman is guilty of a crime and the frustration of the Kyrgyz public that the Kyrgyz cannot try the airman in the Kyrgyz system; 2) the possible later U.S. announcement that the airman will not be charged with a crime and will therefore not stand trial in the U.S.; 3) the conclusion of the processing of Mrs. Ivanova's foreign claim resulting in an amount lower than the \$2.1 million requested or rejection of the claim; 4) our decision on compensation for the September collision between a USAF plane and a Kyrgyz airliner; 5) the possibility that parliament will follow up on its December 15 resolution and hold hearings on the base and specifically on the details of base payments; 6) our upcoming April request to renew the July 14, 2006 Protocol of Intentions, which could spark a request for additional compensation ) although

the Protocol clearly precludes the Kyrgyz Government from making such a request; and 7) Kyrgyzstan's hosting of the SCO Summit in June could lead to renewed Russian and Chinese pressure on Bakiyev to reconsider the base.

¶16. (C) We believe that with pre-cleared, pre-positioned press statements and/or guidance that the Embassy and base can deploy immediately, we can weather these storms. But based on the pattern over the last two years, we predict the public mood could turn ugly. We can expect harsh, ill-thought-through pronouncements by the ever-changeable President Bakiyev. We can expect the parliament, the press, and the public to take their cue from the leadership and respond just as irresponsibly. We can also expect media based in Russia, which has greater penetration in Kyrgyzstan than Kyrgyz media, to also play an unconstructive role. Nevertheless, we think that )- barring an unforeseeable catastrophe -- we can probably ride through these events as we have others. Moreover, we believe that if the Kyrgyz calculation changes, our steadfast allies on the base at the Ministry of Defense will let us know, and we will be able to adjust accordingly.

¶17. (C) However, the issue of base payments is potentially the most damaging, as U.S. silence on the amount we pay directly to the government fosters the erroneous but widely held belief that we are paying off Bakiyev. Even the ever-agreeable Parliamentary Speaker Sulatanov is starting to push on this issue, and it is clear that no one in the government understands -) or perhaps wants to understand --

BISHKEK 00000125 003.2 OF 004

how the Kyrgyz Government is compensated. To the extent that we can be more forthcoming on what portion of our overall \$150 million assistance package consists of direct transfers for services received from the government, it would help both the base and the bilateral relationship.

GETTING AHEAD OF THE POWER CURVE: EMBASSY RECOMMENDATION  
-----

¶18. (C) We expect the unpredictability of the current domestic political situation to continue in 2007, with both the opposition and the administration using the base in their own domestic political arguments. Issues that should be resolvable could become mired in politics, and older issues constantly re-opened. It is likely this will be accompanied by inflammatory rhetoric, which does not necessarily reflect where President Bakiyev or the Kyrgyz Government are, but serves to show the Kyrgyz people and the Russians that the Kyrgyz are not American lackeys. All this makes for an uncertain ally, complicates our efforts to manage public perception as well as political support for the base, and increases the likelihood that the base will continue to lurch from crisis to crisis.

We suggest the USG take the following steps to try to get ahead of the curve:

-- Regular high level visits to underscore to the senior leadership here the importance of the relationship and the base. A visit by Secretary of Defense Gates could have a positive impact on rebuilding the military relationship, smoothing troubled waters, and setting the forward course. A visit by the Secretary for as short as four hours while en route to Afghanistan could be useful.

-- Other members of the Kyrgyz elite, who make decisions and influence public opinion, also need to understand that the base is in their interest. We recommend identifying key individuals (e.g., the President's National Security Council, senior parliamentary leaders) and have their Afghan counterparts invite them to tour Afghanistan with Kyrgyz media in tow. The point will quickly be made that the situation in Afghanistan is complex, but that in contrast the Kyrgyz security situation is vastly improved since 2001 when

the Taliban provided safe haven and a launching pad for terrorists and extremists into Central Asia. If the Coalition is unsuccessful in Afghanistan, Kyrgyzstan, whose borders are less than 100 miles away at their closest point, will be one of the first to suffer.

-- The U.S. provides briefings on the situation in Afghanistan to those who cannot or would not travel there, such as President Bakiyev. To help generate public support for the base, we could even consider a briefing for parliamentary leaders and the Kyrgyz press.

-- The U.S. provides briefings to key neighbors who also have an interest in seeing a stable Afghanistan, but have played an unconstructive or neutral role on the base: Russia, China, Kazakhstan.

-- The U.S. encourages President Karzai to establish a relationship with President Bakiyev, so that Bakiyev hears first hand from his Central Asian neighbor that the Base is necessary.

-- Embassy Bishkek and Manas AFB continue base familiarization trips for Kyrgyz decision-makers and media.

BISHKEK 00000125 004.2 OF 004

-- Embassy Bishkek and Manas AFB continue public outreach with our messages; the most important message being that Kyrgyzstan needs the base as much as the base needs Kyrgyzstan.

-- Embassy Bishkek and Manas AFB continue to engage Kyrgyz decisionmakers who are influential on base issues on a regular basis, and in response to inflammatory public statements made by government officials, to reiterate the positive security, economic and political benefits of the base and to refute disinformation about the base.

-- The U.S. be more forthcoming publicly about the compensation package for the Base. The public perception that we are paying off the Bakiyev family continues to harm us.

LITZENBERGER